

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

SEPTEMBER 2012

A RIVER, A WELL, A WOMAN AND MESSIAH

Three of the gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke record the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan. It is Matthew that tells us the purpose of his baptism: "...it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Jesus' baptism was not for his repenting, he had nothing to repent of. It was not for church (or synagogue) membership. Neither was it an example for us today. His baptism was "to fulfill all righteousness". When John tried to prevent his baptizing of Jesus, his answer was: "Permit it at this time for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." John and Jesus ("us") were to "fulfill all righteousness." John was of the tribe of Levi and the son of a Levite priest (Luke 1:5-45). It was the Levites who were responsible for all the ceremonies, rites and rituals that God required of Israel that they might be "sanctified for the cleansing of the flesh" (Heb.9:13). Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14) of whom it was said "The scepter shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Gen.49:10). It was fitting that a Levite be involved in the inauguration of the ministry of the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice for sin.

His baptism was to "fulfill all righteousness" but what does the word "fulfill" mean and how is it related to righteousness? The Greek Lexicons define the word as: "to complete, make full, filled, performs fully, finishes, accomplishes." Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, 18: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law until all is accomplished." Jesus said in Luke 16:16: "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John, since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached..." Matthew's record is a shorter version: "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John" (Matt. 11:13). Jesus' mission accomplishes the fulfillment of the true intent of the law. All that the law demanded was accomplished by Christ. The keeping of the law demanded perfect righteousness: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Jesus is said to be "the righteous one" (I John 2:1). The righteousness Jesus would fulfill is prophesied in Isaiah 53:11: "By his knowledge the Righteous One, My servant, will justify (make righteous) the many." Jesus began his ministry by numbering himself with "the many" he had come to make righteous. His whole ministry was a "fulfillment of righteousness".

The "fulfillment of all righteousness" means that all the ritualism, legalism, sacrificing of animals, the keeping of feasts and holy days, new moons and Sabbaths, the priest going behind the veil into the holy of holies once a year and making atonement for another year and all the Levitical types and Levitical priesthood, all of which God once required, were done away with by the one sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:12). He fulfilled all the righteous acts required of the Jews under the Old Covenant. Colossians chapter two shows how this is applicable today and Hebrews chapter ten supplies the details relating to "fulfilling all righteousness".

A seemingly unrelated event in the ministry of Christ helps us understand the significance of Jesus' words to John; "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" is his encounter with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:3-31).

Just who were the Samaritans, with whom "the Jews had no dealing" (ver.9)? When Israel was carried into exile from their own land to Assyria "the king of Assyria brought men from Babel and from Cuthah and Avva and from Hamath and Sepharviam, and settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel. So they possessed Samaria and lived in its cities. And it came about at the beginning of their living there, "they did not fear the Lord." (II Kings 17:24,25). The king then sent a priest that was in exile to Samaria to live among them and teach them "the customs of the God of the land." The result was "they feared the Lord and served their own gods according to the custom of the nations" (II Kings 27-33). After Israel (the northern tribes) was taken into Assyria the Scriptures do not give a record of their living in captivity as they do Judah, (the southern tribe). However we do know there was widespread intermarriage with them and the tribes living in Samaria. When Ezra and Nehemiah returned to the land to rebuild the city and temple, they insisted on a separation of Samaritans and the returning Jews (Ezra 9, 10; Neh, 13). Because of this hostility there was a religious separation and the Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim. This is the mountain the woman referred to in verse 20. Although Jesus instructed his Apostles when he sent them out to "not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans: but rather go the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5,6), he did have some dealings with the Samaritans (Luke 10:33, 17:16; John 4:39-42).

The sign that Jesus was living up to his baptism in "fulfilling all righteousness" was his dealing with this Samaritan woman (with whom the Jews had no dealings), showing that he was breaking down the barrier of the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14) and that what God had cleansed was no longer common (Acts 10:15). Jesus steps over the boundary of Jewish tradition and asks the woman for a drink. This astonished woman asked, "How is that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (Jn. 4: 9). When the disciples returned, they marveled that he was speaking to a woman (ver. 27). No respectful Rabbi would have even spoken to a Samaritan much less a Samaritan woman! But Jesus had come to "fulfill all righteousness" not to perpetuate the tradition of the Jews they called "righteousness". He makes it plain that if the woman knew the gift of God and who he was, she would have asked him and he would have given her living water (ver. 10). There are passages in the Old Testament that describe "living" water: Gen: 26:19: "Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water" (marginal: "living water"); Leviticus 14:5 also speaks of "living water" variously translated as "running" and "fresh" water". Jeremiah 2:13: "My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for them cisterns..." The water Jesus speaks of is not the water that merely quenched physical thirst, but forever quenched the deep inner soul thirst every person experiences, but was

water “springing up to eternal life” (ver.14). The water Jesus is speaking of is that new spiritual life in him that is given by the Holy Spirit (John 6:63) through faith and “from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water,” which was “the Spirit, whom those who believed were to receive” (John 7:38,39).

William Barclay in his *Daily Study Bible Series* says “we have to note that this conversation with the Samaritan woman follows exactly the same pattern as the conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus makes a statement. The statement is misunderstood and taken in the wrong sense. Jesus remakes the statement in an even more vivid way. It is still misunderstood; and then Jesus compels the person to discover the truth for himself or herself... both Nicodemus and the woman took the words of Jesus quite literally, when she was meant to understand them spiritually.” The Bible is the inspired word of God (II Tim. 3:16, 17; II Peter 1:20). However to know that the Bible is the “literal” word of God does not mean every word has a literal meaning. Much of the Bible is written in symbolic language, such as the two examples of Nicodemus and the woman at the well and the books of Revelation, Daniel and Ezekiel. Much of the teaching of Jesus was in parables. There is also types, shadows, allegories and anecdotes used throughout the Bible. Unlike Nicodemus and the woman, we need not be in the dark or ignorant about such teachings because “we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things freely given us of God” (I Cor.2:12).

Again she does not understand and, perhaps in jest or contempt, said “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw” (Jn.4:15). Perhaps there is a bit of irony in her response. She asks for the water, but saw it only as something that would benefit her physically. Much of the religious world today has the same problem. From the “Name it and Claim it” movement where TV evangelists convinces people they can literally have anything they want (all things that make you happy, usually personal wealth and health) if you only have faith and send them an offering ...from that to the phenomena we are witnessing today...the religious world that learns from social scientists how to grow itself, fills churches that look like shopping malls, counts in its numbers the moneyed and powerful, showing the greatest membership and financial growth in history, yet causes barely a ripple in the affairs of society. With the church showing the greatest membership and financial growth in history, we now have the worst crime record in the world. Many want the living water, but only if it can meet their felt needs caring little about drinking the living water.

Jesus “fulfilling all righteousness” is seen in his dealing with the woman’s immorality (verses 16-19). Jesus asks the woman to do what she cannot do. He knew she had five husbands and the man she was now living with was not her husband. The “righteousness” of the scribes and Pharisees is seen when they “brought a woman caught in adultery and having set her in the midst, said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such a woman, what do you say?’ (John 8 3-5). The response of Jesus was “he who is without sin let him first cast a stone.” They all took a walk and Jesus told the woman he did not condemn her and for her to “go your way, from now on sin no more.” In II Corinthians 3:8, 9 Paul speaks of “the ministry of condemnation” which kills, and “the ministry of righteousness” which gives life.

In not condemning either woman Jesus is “fulfilling all righteousness” by replacing the condemnation of the Law with the righteousness of the Spirit.

The woman quickly changes the subject by suggesting Jesus was a prophet and began talking about worship. The most dramatic area showing Jesus “fulfilling all righteousness” is in the Biblical accounts of worship. To both Jew and Samaritan the place of worship was crucial. The woman sums up this attitude when she stated: “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain (*Mt. Gerizim*) and you say that Jerusalem (*Mt. Zion*) is the place where men ought to worship” (ver. 20). Jesus’ answer was that the hour was coming when they would worship in neither place, but all *true worshippers* would worship the Father in Spirit and truth (vers. 21, 23). The ‘hour that was coming’ was the calamitous event when the Roman war machine under the leadership of Generals Vespasian and his son Titus would decimate both Samaria (Mt Gerizem as a place of worship) and Judah (Jerusalem and the temple). With these worship centers in ashes both the Samaritans and Jews would have to approach God in a new way. There would be no human clergy to oversee a worship system and no formalized system of “do’s” and “don’ts” nor any other “churchy/synagoguery” way of doing things. The reason for this was “God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (ver. 24). This, then, “fulfills all righteousness” that was “righteousness by the works Law” (Rom. 3:20) and “the works or righteousness” which man has done (Titus 3:5).

Worship in spirit does not mean worship in human spirit in contrast to worship by ritual and external forms; it means worship empowered by the Spirit of God. The contrast here is between worship in spirit and truth compared with the worship in Jerusalem or in Mt. Gerizim. Truth came through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:7) and Jesus said he is the truth (Jn. 14:6). “Worship in the truth is synonymous with worship in spirit. This is worship mediated through Jesus Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit. The place and form of worship are irrelevant. Jesus having “fulfilled all righteousness” means we “have confidence to enter the holy place (heaven itself Heb. 9:24) by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh and since we have a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ...” (Heb. 10:19-11). The Messiah, the woman knew was coming was speaking to her (John 4:25, 26).

There is still much confusion about worship. As my friend the late Curtis Dickinson wrote in *The Witness*: “In studying this subject I was surprised to learn that not once in the N.T. does it say that God’s people ever came together to worship. The assembly was never called a ‘worship service’ and people are never spoken of as ‘worshipping.’ This is not to say that they did not worship as they assembled. My guess is that they did, but you won’t find it in scripture. Nor did they have ‘houses of worship’ in the modern sense. They met in homes, or public places, and we have no clue as to an ‘order of service’ in their meetings. Our worship services are derived from five sources: Old Testament temple worship; Roman Catholicism, passed through the Reformation; pagan practices which were never fully abandoned by converts; some New Testament practices; and the format for many of today’s worship services seem to be copied from the theater (T.V. and movies etc.). Some go to church to escape from reality they find in exciting programs.”